

VZCZCXRO2890
PP RUEHROV
DE RUEHDS #1684/01 1521506
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 011506Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6411
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHMFISS/CJTF HOA
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHMFISS/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 001684

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E AND DRL: S.JOSEPH
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER
CJTF-HOA AND USCENCOM FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/01/2017
TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KJUS](#) [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [ET](#)
SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: DETAINED CUD OPPOSITION LEADER UNDERGOES
SUCCESSFUL SURGERY

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 01436 AND PREVIOUS
[1](#)B. ADDIS ABABA 1420

Classified By: POLOFF SEAN CELY. REASON: 1.4 (D).

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: On May 29, detained Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) chairman Hailu Shawel underwent eye surgery as a follow-up to treatment he received in February 2006 for a detached retina. As there are no properly trained ophthalmologic surgeons in Ethiopia, and there was a risk of Hailu going blind, a specialist from South Africa was hastily brought to Ethiopia by the GOE for the initial surgery. The overdue follow-up procedure, while important, did not pose the same immediate threat if untreated and therefore did not prompt the GOE to bring the South African specialist back. For both humanitarian reasons, and to prevent the lack of medical treatment from impeding ongoing sensitive discussions aimed at securing clemency for Hailu and other high-profile opposition leaders (ref B), Post worked with Hailu's family and supporters, the South African eye surgeon, and a range of GOE officials to facilitate Hailu's treatment. Funding came from CUD supporters in the Diaspora, and Post worked with GOE authorities ranging from Prime Minister Meles to police, prison, and hospital officials to secure the GOE's cooperation to allow the South African doctor to return. The surgery was successful, and Hailu's vision should steadily improve. Hailu expressed gratitude to all involved to make the surgery happen. END SUMMARY.

THREAT OF BLINDNESS PROMPTS INITIAL SURGERY

[1](#)2. (SBU) On February 14, 2006, detained CUD chairman Hailu Shawel (ref A) was diagnosed with a detached retina in his left eye, a condition possibly aggravated by Hailu's diabetes and his detention since November 2005, according to RMO, who along with then-Charge Huddleston met with Hailu's family members and personal physician. As a similar ailment nearly 30 years earlier had left Hailu with little vision in his right eye, had the new diagnosis gone untreated, he would have become partially blind. As no doctors in Ethiopia were properly trained in treating detached retinas, and no local hospitals had the necessary equipment, the GOE agreed, with pressure from Post and the Department, to fly in a specialist from South Africa to perform surgery on Hailu. This first surgery was successfully completed by Dr. Polla Roux on February 20, 2006. However, the procedure required that Hailu's eye be filled with a silicone gel for 6-12 months,

which would then be drained and checked.

FOLLOW-UP LESS IMMINENT, MORE DIFFICULT TO ARRANGE

¶3. (SBU) While the initial surgery was hastily arranged due to the risk of Hailu going blind, the follow-up procedure did not hold the same imminent threat. Although numerous complications, including possible loss of vision, could have resulted from not removing the gel or allowing a trained specialist to follow-up, nearly 15 months passed with no return trip by Dr. Roux.

¶4. (SBU) Prime Minister Meles readily agreed to allow the second treatment, when the issue was raised by the Ambassador in March 2007. However, lack of effective inter-agency coordination among GOE offices (e.g., the PM's office, MFA, Federal Police Commissioner, prison wardens, and police hospital authorities) required that an external party actively engage working-level officials, while interacting with Hailu's family, doctors, and potential financial sponsors of the medical treatment. For example, coordination with CUD leadership in the U.S. resulted in their agreement to provide the funding necessary to pay for the doctor's equipment and flight to Ethiopia. This coordination would have been impossible for Hailu's family, as documentation of financial transactions between U.S.-based diaspora to CUD leaders in Ethiopia had been cited by prosecutors as evidence of subversion and conspiracy, in the ongoing criminal trial of Hailu and other detained opposition leaders (ref A).

¶5. (SBU) Following concerted efforts by Ambassador, poloff,

ADDIS ABAB 00001684 002 OF 002

and RSO, Post received full cooperation from senior GOE officials, including PM Meles, and received permission for the doctor to visit Ethiopia with specialized medical equipment, as well as for police and prison officials to make appropriate logistical arrangements for Hailu's surgery. Dr. Roux arrived on May 27, examined Hailu at the Police Hospital on May 28, and declared that the eye on which he had performed surgery in 2006 was in good condition and had healed well. On May 29, Dr. Roux performed the procedure to drain the silicone gel, as well as remove a thin membrane that had grown on the retina, thus allowing for improved vision. Dr. Roux declared the procedure a complete success and announced that Hailu's vision would improve with time, allowing Hailu to read and see more clearly at short distances. Hailu was very happy to have Dr. Roux back to perform follow-up work, and thanked him and all involved in his return to Ethiopia for their assistance.

EFFORTS BY POST TO HELP HAILU WILL PAY OFF

¶6. (C) COMMENT. Hailu Shawel's failing vision and lack of access to appropriate medical care for the initial surgery was a significant issue for not only followers of his CUD party and Ethiopians in the Diaspora, but also diplomatic missions in Addis Ababa observing his continued trial and detention. Had he gone blind, possible protests could have frustrated ongoing efforts to promote political reconciliation between the ruling EPRDF coalition and opposition leaders (ref B), and would have raised concerns among international donors and the Diaspora about continued USG support of and engagement with the GOE. Surprisingly, Hailu's immediate family was a hindrance to getting the operation done, due to their minimal cooperation. Post's facilitation underscored to the Ethiopian diaspora, Hailu's followers in Ethiopia, and GOE officials, USG concern for human rights and humanitarian treatment of political detainees. END COMMENT.
YAMAMOTO